

Over 100,000 join protests and strikes in Italy

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Following France, youth protests and unrest also broke out in Italy last weekend. Around 100,000 people in more than 40 cities took part in the “No Meloni Day” on Friday, a reference to Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni of the neo-fascist Fratelli d’Italia party (Brothers of Italy).

School student organisations had called for protests against dilapidating conditions in schools at a time of rising military spending. Thousands poured into the streets in Rome, Bologna, Milan, Turin and elsewhere, in some cases supported by parents and teachers. They sang songs and carried red banners, Palestinian flags and hand-painted placards bearing slogans such as “Fund schools, not wars,” “More schools, fewer bombs” and “You’ve picked on the wrong generation.”

The German and Northern European media have completely ignored these largely peaceful protests, which continued on Saturday, when 10,000 people rallied in Rome against the rising cost of living. By contrast, the media have played up the riots and clashes with police that took place in Milan, Turin and Rome. Police detained 271 young people, 220 of them minors, the youngest not yet 12.

The school strike had itself been preceded by a whole week of strikes in the south, which barely any non-Italian newspaper has noted either. In Apulia, steelworkers in Taranto have been fighting for months against the closure of the Ilva steelworks, which will mean up to 20,000 redundancies. Last week the steelworkers were supported by hauliers (truck drivers) and farmers, who helped to blockade the port with articulated lorries and tractors, preventing tankers from entering and leaving the Eni refinery. The struggle against the impending closure of Ilva is combined with anger over high fuel prices and the threat to farmers’ livelihoods.

By October 20 hauliers’ protests had spread to Apulia, Calabria, Sicily, Campania and Basilicata. Some 3,000 olive growers, who are fighting for their livelihoods in the region, also drove their tractors to the prefecture in Bari. In Apulia, one in two Eni petrol stations reported running out of petrol, and several airports in southern Italy reported dangerously low kerosene stocks. Because of transport bottlenecks, supplies of fruit, vegetables and other fresh produce are

already running short in Italian supermarkets.

Rising fuel prices as a result of the Iran war are having a devastating effect. Energy prices have risen by 22 to 26 percent since February, diesel alone by 31 percent to €2.25 a litre. Inflation has climbed to 4.2 percent, while wages have officially risen by only 2.5 percent.

Real wages have fallen by 9.4 percent since 2021. And that affects only those with reasonably secure jobs; the situation is even worse for the unemployed and those in precarious work. Italy officially has 5.4 million people living in absolute poverty, including 1.1 million children. Very many young people can barely find a decent job even with a good university degree.

Meanwhile, the government is ramping up rearmament, as in every European country. It has committed to spending 3.2 percent of GDP on arms by 2028 and 5 percent by 2035. Italy has applied to the EU for a special loan of €14.4 billion, half of which is to go to the military. By 2025, military spending had risen to €42.7 billion, almost 90 percent more than in 2013. Spending on social security, health and education, by contrast, has been in decline for years.

After the weekend’s disturbances, Prime Minister Meloni convened a crisis meeting of her cabinet on Monday. She demanded that the so-called opposition, the Democratic Party and the Five Star Movement (M5S), immediately “distance themselves from the violence.”

Yet these parties, “left” in name only, had already done so. Elly Schlein, the Democratic Party leader, condemned the violence immediately on Saturday, and Maurizio Landini, head of the General Confederation of Italian Labour (CGIL), called the looting “criminal” and had his union confederation’s support conveyed to the police. Meanwhile, the Meloni government had already introduced new security laws (DDL Sicurezza) in the summer to outlaw strikes and protest actions.

The government is exploiting the youth unrest in Milan and Turin, and the looting, which continued on Sunday, to whip up law-and-order hysteria and build up police state measures. If some young people from run-down suburbs, who have known only contempt and neglect for decades,

march through expensive shopping streets and loot luxury shops, it is an expression of extreme social polarisation—although provocateurs are certainly also joining in. This “strategy of tension” has been a tradition in Italy since the “Years of Lead” (“Anni di Piombo”) of the 1970s.

When several dozen young people again rampaged and looted through the city centres of Milan and Turin on Sunday and clashed with police, the government reacted immediately with even tougher laws, more police and the immediate deployment of 500 more soldiers inside the country. On October 19, leading figures from the Lega, Forza Italia and Fratelli d'Italia marched through central Milan in solidarity with damaged retailers, to bolster the police. What drives them is fear of the spectre of revolution.

As in France, Spain, Portugal and elsewhere, the inability of young people to find decent work after school and university coincides in Italy with the growing resistance of the working class. The needs of the masses can no longer be met under capitalism. Workers' strikes are merging with farmers' protests, lorry blockades and unrest among school students, university students and young people, and the mood for a general strike against the Meloni government is growing.

One worker told the newspaper *L'Espresso*, “I am ashamed of my colleagues in the north, because those in the south have organised a standstill. They are losing money; they are losing their dignity. ... We should shut everything down, from first to last.” A young second-generation migrant to Italy told the daily *La Repubblica* in Turin, “We were born and raised here, we pay taxes like everyone else.”

A student said, “Our protest is becoming a permanent mobilisation. If you steal our future, we will block your present.” Luna, 17, told the website *juorno.it*, “This is only the beginning of a very hot autumn, not just in Italy but across Europe.”

The extreme polarisation between rich and poor is giving rise to a social movement that the trade unions can no longer control. At the same time, the bourgeois parties are preparing for war and dictatorship. What is needed is the building of a leadership that fights not only the Meloni government but capitalism, and fights for socialism and internationalism. This means building the Italian section of the International Committee of the Fourth International (ICFI).

The main weakness of the movement is precisely this lack of political leadership, which was again evident this week. The large union confederations—the CGIL, the Italian Confederation of Trade Unions (CISL) and the Italian Labour Union (UIL)—have called several strikes, each local and lasting a few hours or a day. Their purpose is to contain and fragment the movement, not to prepare a general strike

that would raise the question of power, which the unions strictly reject.

The strikes involve bus drivers in Rome, Savona, Udine and Bari and hospital workers in Sicily. Strikes by telecom workers across the country and by refuse collectors in Calabria have also been announced. A comprehensive strike in transport and on the railways is due on Friday.

The metalworkers' unions Fim, Fiom and Uilm, which are organising the action at the Ilva steelworks in both Taranto and Genoa, have for now announced a strike up to October 23. They are demanding talks with the Meloni government, the employers and shareholder representatives with the aim of securing the future of the steel division. “Until the meeting at Palazzo Chigi [the seat of government],” their statement says, “we will consider further strikes.”

CGIL head Landini has announced a general strike, to be held in a month's time, on November 20 (!), and to last just one day. The CGIL says it wants to demonstrate for higher wages, against the 2027 austerity budget and against further military spending, and is demanding an additional one-percent tax on the rich. In southern Italy, the haulage associations have demanded a round table with Minister Salvini to secure cuts to taxes and levies and otherwise threaten a lorry convoy to Rome.

The grassroots unions (USB, SI Cobas, CUB, SGB) are each organising their own separate strike actions, providing a safety valve for the anger, albeit with more militant-sounding slogans than the CGIL and UIL. The Confederazione Unitaria di Base (CUB) posted, “Against the economy of war, rearmament and social devastation.” Against the CGIL's “general strike” on November 20, the grassroots unions are holding their own general strike on October 30. On that day the Unione Sindacale di Base (USB) wants to protest against militarisation at Italian ports together with international dockworkers.



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